

Formative Language Assessment through Software and Web 2.0 Tools

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Abstract

The main advantage of using software and Web 2.0 tools during formative assessment is that they allow unsophisticated computer users design their own interactive exercises. QuizStar, ESLvideo, Socrative, and Cram are a few examples of Web 2.0 tools that empower teachers by enabling them to create online quizzes and to test their students' knowledge. In addition to these online quiz creation tools, Quiz Faber, Hot Potatoes, Wondershare QuizCreator and Articulate Quizmaker are among the software, offering the opportunity to create various types of questions including single or multiple answer multiple choice, true-false, fill in the blank, matching based on grammar, listening and reading comprehension, as well as aimed at practicing spelling. In this paper, these tools are briefly introduced, showing the main functions and focusing on the potential use in language learning and teaching. Special attention is given to language teachers' needs while choosing an authoring tool, taking different contexts and settings as creating one's own exercises with authoring tools can be considered a time-consuming process. Suggestions are made to overcome the limited time and how to present the created items to the language learners.

Keywords

Formative assessment, Web 2.0 tools, authoring tools

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is considered one of the key aspects of any learning process since it not only reveals whether learning goals have been achieved but also provides feedback to both teachers and learners about their performances [1]. It is no doubt that educational testing is pervasive in schools, and teachers use a variety of instruments in various formats ranging from multiple-choice to essay questions to assess their students' performance. This assessment is conducted not only to determine whether the desired goals are achieved but also to account for student achievement since schools, most of the time, are ranked 'best' or 'bad' by stakeholders, be it parents or students themselves, based on the scores obtained on mandated tests. The importance attached to these scores and the tests led any stakeholder involved to the introduction of more tests with a large number of test-takers. This increased importance attached to tests, together with the number of test-takers has led test-creators to better use of the technological developments to provide fast and reliable results and deliver them to the test-takers. Among the good examples benefiting from technological developments is the TOEFL iBT test, which is administered via the Internet and acts a high-stakes test for students to prove their proficiency in English.

However, in addition to these mandated tests, the assessment instruments that language teachers use in their classroom also gain importance as they are mainly used for the instructional needs of students, e.g. to check their strengths and weaknesses and to act accordingly. The integration of technology into formative assessment, therefore, is believed to be learner-centered and can be tailored to provide students with extra practice [2].

BACKGROUND

Formative assessment aims to help teachers to check their students' current language ability, focusing on what they know and what do not know and then act accordingly. In return, based on the feedback provided by the results of formative assessment, teachers plan subsequent activities to compensate for the weaknesses and improve their strengths. According to Brown (2010, p. 7),

formative assessment is evaluating students in the process of "forming their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process [3].

For formative assessments to be used as effective tools, they must take learning goals into consideration [4]. As indicated by McMillan (2010), the classroom environment should also be characterized by respect, tolerance, honest communication and collaboration to support formative assessment [5]. Moreover, it is also vital that formative assessments, due to their nature, be implemented throughout learning and teaching process for several times contrary to summative assessments conducted at the end of the units or the semester. However, considering the number of class hours teachers are required to teach as well as the number of the students in each

class, achieving effective formative assessments does not seem to be possible as the nature of formative assessments require assessing students at different times and provide feedback to students following each assessment. Moreover, limited class time as well as other factors such as scoring students' papers appears to be important issues for teachers willing to conduct formative assessments. In fact, these issues lead new technological developments to provide easy yet effective solutions. New technology allows transforming paper-and-pencil tests to digital assessment instruments where students' performances are assessed easily and practically, though some limitations may apply. Johnson and Kiviniemi (2009), for instance, administered quizzes on assigned readings in an introductory social psychology course through a web-based testing system [6]. The results indicated that the participants who had completed required reading quizzes improved their exam and classroom performances. In a similar study, Dumova (2012), in her examination of the usability of online quizzes and student perceptions, found that students considered online tests user-friendly and simple to use [7]. Moreover, the study underscored the importance of online tests as they provided students with the opportunity to move beyond the walls of the classroom where they could continue their learning. Therefore, it is believed that informing teachers on the use of software and Web 2.0 tools that will support formative language assessment is of vital importance as they, at least, will be provided some solutions to the aforementioned issues.

The main advantage of using software and Web 2.0 tools during formative assessment is that they allow unsophisticated computer users design their own interactive exercises. They can

be accompanied with or remedial explanations upon the responses provided. Moreover, audio, video and graphic material can be added to the exercises, which is a great advantage, especially in creating tasks appropriate for the particular target group dealing with listening activities. QuizStar, ESLvideo, Socrative, and Cram are a few examples of Web 2.0 tools that empower teachers by enabling them to create online quizzes and to test their students' knowledge. In addition to these online quiz creation tools, Quiz Faber, FLAn, Teacher's Pet, and Wondershare QuizCreator are among the software, offering the opportunity to create various types of questions including single or multiple answer multiple choice, true-false, fill in the blank, matching based on grammar, listening and reading comprehension, as well as aimed at practicing spelling. By the help of its features, users can also add sounds, flash animations, images, narrations, hyperlinks, and screenshots to the questions and answers they prepare, using the templates allowing to create certain kinds of exercises available. The ready-made activities in these tools can be exported to use in Internet Explorer or other kinds of Internet browsers, to the Web, the local hard disk or flash disk for distribution.

In this paper, these tools are briefly introduced, showing the main functions and focusing on the potential use in language learning and teaching. Special attention is given to language teachers' needs while choosing an authoring tool, taking different contexts and settings as creating one's own exercises with authoring tools can be considered a time-consuming process. Suggestions are made to overcome the limited time and how to present the created items to the language learners.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Formative Assessment through Software

Quiz Faber, FLAn (Foreign Language Annotator), Teacher's Pet, and Wondershare QuizCreator are just a few examples of authoring tools allowing to design interactive exercises that can be used for formative assessment. The main advantage of these tools is that they do not require any kind of programming skills; that is, language teachers do not have to deal with any codes. Anyone that knows how to use any word-processing software can easily create questions and export them to use on any kind of Internet browsers, hard disks, or any learning management systems such as Moodle. Below is some basic information about the selected authoring tools.

QuizFaber

QuizFaber, available at www.lucagalli.net, allows creating multimedia quizzes in HTML format in an easy way. Without dealing with any kind of knowledge of scripts or codes, different types of questions can be created, such as multiple choice with only one correct answer or with multiple answers, true or false questions, open-ended questions, gap-filling or matching questions. One of the most powerful feature of this software is that multimedia objects such as sounds and images can be inserted into any question or answer. The questions can be stored on an internal or external server where answers can be automatically analyzed and stored in seconds. Google Drive can also be used as remote database to save quiz results. As with the other authoring tools, this software requires some technical knowledge on how to set up a server to store questions and analyze the answer provided to these questions.

FLAn (Foreign Language Annotator)

FLAn (Foreign Language Annotator), available at redhotwords.com, is a free hypermedia editor that works on both Macs and PCs. It is especially useful for reading activities since it is possible to change any kind of texts into dynamic units through providing information to any part of the text used. This information can be definitions of the selected words, or the translation of the selected part into learners' mother tongue in addition to the use of any multimedia resources such as links to videos or images available at different websites. Quizzes created using other authoring tools such as QuizFaber can be linked to the units designed by FLAn. It is suggested that the texts to be used in FLAn be short enough to promote deeper understanding.

Teacher's Pet

Teacher's Pet, available at www.teachers-pet.org, is a tool-bar or an add-in tool for word processing software to create worksheets for language classrooms, which will allow teachers to provide their students with extra written practice on vocabulary and grammar. Most teachers prepare extra materials to accompany the course books since most of these course books do not provide enough practice for students to master the materials. This is where Teacher's Pet can play an important role. Teacher's Pet includes a variety of tools while creating worksheets: Classroom card, gap-fill and multiple choice, vocabulary building, grammar and comprehension, spelling and pronunciation, and reference tools. These tools allow creating activities based on word, sentence, and text level.

Wondershare QuizCreator

Wondershare QuizCreator, available at www.wondershare.com/pro/quizcreator.ht

ml, is a professional quiz creation software similar to QuizFaber. Wondershare QuizCreator enables creating Flash-based quizzes as well as surveys that include multimedia resources. The quizzes or surveys created through this software includes eighteen types of questions including Fill-in-the-blank, matching, and short essays. The questions can be enhanced by adding flash videos, audios, as well as images. It also allows creating quizzes for other subjects such as Math using the equation editor. When the quizzes created are published online, the quiz results can be tracked easily with the detailed reports on the Wondershare QuizCreator Online server. The quizzes can be published to QuizCreator Online or uploaded as Flash quizzes to your own/school server. Moreover, a SCORM quiz package can be created so that it can be used with your LMS (Learning Management System) such as Moodle, or alternatively, the quizzes can be used as stand-alone EXE files or be exported as Word files for paper-based formative assessment.

Formative Assessment through Web 2.0 Tools

The authoring tools briefly discussed above have to be installed on computers and require a web server with databases in order to upload quizzes and track your learners via quiz results. However, there is a solution to this issue: using online or web-based quiz creation tools. These tools allows creating online quizzes without dealing with any server settings or programming codes.

QuizStar

QuizStar, available at quizstar.4teachers.org, is a free online web-based quiz creation tool that allows creating and designing online quizzes. Better still, QuizStar automatically

analyzes the responses to the questions in a quiz and grade quizzes just in seconds. The performances of all the students taking the quizzes are provided in detail using graphs. Different quizzes can be assigned to different classes, which is very useful when teachers have more than one class or teach different subjects. Multimedia resources can be attached to the questions, and the quizzes can be accessed by using any electronic device, be it a tablet or a smartphone, which is connected to the Internet. As previously explained, it is not needed to install any software since all needed will be an Internet browser and a device connected to the Internet.

ESLvideo

ESLvideo, available at www.eslvideo.com, allows using educational resources available as well as creating quizzes which are based on videos publicly shared on YouTube and many similar video-hosting websites. The major benefit of ESLvideo lies in its features that allow creating video-based quizzes without worrying about hosting issues or technical requirements. ESLvideo aims to enable teachers to create quizzes on the selected videos to improve basically students' listening skills; however, the quiz activities might also help your learners improve grammar and vocabulary skills. Like QuizStar, without technical knowledge or serve requirements, it is easy to assign quizzes and then track students' performance online. ESLvideo also categorizes the video-based quizzes created by other users based on students' level so that other teachers can also assign these quizzes to their students based on their needs.

Socrative

Socrative, available at www.socrative.com, is a free Web 2.0 tool

that enables teachers to create quizzes and games on any content. Socrative provides real-time interaction with the content, which might include various types of questions such as multiple-choice and true/false questions. Socrative has a great feature over the others as creating quizzes and answering the questions is possible, without any design issues, at all devices connected to the internet such as tablets and smartphones. That is, Socrative is accessible on all devices and all browsers. Moreover, students' performances are analyzed and tracked in real time, with quizzes as well as polling auto graded. Like the previous tools, both individual and whole class reports are available on the system. The educational game "Space Race" also provides students with the opportunity to work individually or in teams in a fun and enjoyable way.

Cram

Several studies on vocabulary learning and teaching [8, 9] have found that using flashcards can promote learning and practicing previously-learned lexical items. Therefore, using flashcard-based activities in the classroom is believed to contribute to students' learning lexical items. Cram, available at www.cram.com, allows creating digital flashcard sets as study materials for lexical items on any topic. Most students complain that they easily forget the words while learning a second and/or foreign language. This is mainly because these students cannot have the opportunity to expose themselves to these words regularly. Therefore, Cram seems to be a useful website for teachers to help their students review and practice the words as well as terms necessary on any topic. Teachers can easily create digital flashcards including the words/terms online and even recycle these flashcards to be used in future classes with minor changes. The flashcards created via Cram

can also be downloaded as PDF files for those who are used to studying on printed materials.

CONCLUSION

Teacher can create informal/formal formative quizzes to test students and monitor their progress in groups or individually. Teachers can try all these software and Web 2.0 tools during formative assessment of their students and decide which software/tools meets their students' needs. It is suggested that teachers focus on not only practicality in terms of use and item but also affordability while choosing these software/tools. Since the main aim of formative assessment is to check students' current progress and determine their weaknesses and strengths and then act accordingly, the software/Web 2.0 tool selected is to be carefully analyzed. Moreover, learners should be provided hands-on experience about the software/tool selected so that they should be familiar with it. Due to the space limitation, only a few software Web 2.0 tools have been provided on this article; however, there are some other software/Web 2.0 tools available on the Internet to create e-learning materials as well as quizzes. Readers are also advised to check the following:

- Anki, a flashcard program, aims to provide learners with the opportunity to create flashcards, available at www.ankisrs.net.
- Quizlet, an online flashcard creation website, offering tests and study games.
- Edmodo, social learning platform to increase communication and collaboration among students, available at www.edmodo.com.

- EduCanon, an online platform to create interactive videos from websites such as YouTube and TeacherTube, available at www.educanon.com.
- SoftChalk Create 9, desktop version of SoftChalk Cloud, a content authoring tool used to create e-learning materials, available at <http://softchalk.com/create9>.

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DOI:10.1080/09571730802390759

ISBN: 978-605-84052-2-6

**II. Uluslararası Dil, Kültür ve Edebiyat Çalıştayı
Bildiri Kitabı**

***2nd International Language, Culture and Literature
Workshop
Proceedings***

Antalya
3 Haziran 2016/ 3 June 2016

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Basım Yeri: Damla Kırtasiye
Akdeniz Üniversitesi Kampusu, Yakut Çarşısı, Uncalı,
Konyaaltı, Antalya

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Sunuş

II. Uluslararası Dil, Kültür ve Edebiyat Çalıştayı 8-10 Haziran 2016 tarihleri arasında Antalya'da Akdeniz Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümünde düzenlenmiştir.

Bu bildiri kitapçığında çalıştayımız boyunca araştırmacılar tarafından sunulmuş bulunan bildirilerden yayımlanmak üzere gönderilenler yer almaktadır. Geçen seneki kitapçığımızı Talat Sait Halman hocamıza armağan eden bizler, bu seneki kitapçığımızı Nobel ödülü alan Aziz Sancar hocamıza armağan etmeyi uygun bulduk. Hocamıza ülkemize ve bizlere yaşattığı bu mutluluk için teşekkürlerimizi bir borç biliriz.

Çalıştayımıza katkıda bulunan bütün araştırmacılarımıza, oturum başkanlarımıza, ve gönüllü olarak çalıştayımız boyunca görev almış öğrencilerimize de teşekkürlerimizi sunarız.

Önümüzdeki sene üçüncüsünü yapmayı planladığımız çalıştayımıza katkılarınızı bekler, düzenleme kurulu adına en derin sevgi ve saygılarımı sunarım.

Doç. Dr. Arda Arıkan

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